

# Severed Wings

by Lyc Spryte

Category: Halo

Genre: Adventure, Friendship

Language: English

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2011-08-15 13:30:01

Updated: 2011-09-25 10:51:31

Packaged: 2016-04-27 01:33:20

Rating: T

Chapters: 12

Words: 21,356

Publisher: [www.fanfiction.net](http://www.fanfiction.net)

Summary: A tale about a couple's fight through the Human-Covenant war. Based on the events surrounding the battle of Earth.

## 1. Chapter 1

### Severed Wings

><em><span>A story of a couple's fight through the Human-Covenant war.<br>\_Based on the Halo universe created by Bungie Studios (and soon to be 343 Industries)

>I do not own Bungie or 343 Industries, and I did not crate the Halo universe. This content is merely my own interpritation, following the already written events from another perspective.<p>

\_A Halo story by Sebastian Avery (C) Copyright 2011\_  
><span>

**\*\*Chapter 1\*\***

06:40 October 20th 2552 (Military calendar)

>Aboard Longsword fighter Bravo 4<br>In high orbit above Earth

Harper stood to the rear of the cabin. Coffee breaks were an essential part of her routine, and she had been without one for the past three hours. The built in machine filled her mug and offered her sugar. Harper pushed the button 'x2' and waited a few seconds more. The sluggish machine dropped two cubes before dispensing a small wooden stirrer, along with the message 'Have a pleasant day'. Harper took her coffee and began stirring it on her way back to her chair. She sat down in front of the pilot's console, and picked up a manuscript from the co-pilots chair. As she held it, she scrolled through its electronic pages with her thumb, frowning in thought about their orders. The usual, everyday information was displayed; Flight plans, patrol routes, docking times, inventory listings.

><em>"Nothing changes."<em> She thought. Harper placed the manuscript

device in the pocket between the two chairs and sunk back in her own chair. She sipped on her coffee and stared at the view screen ahead of her. It displayed earth to the left, and all the orbital defence platforms that blanketed her with three hundred MAC cannons. A handful of ships dotted the vacuum, mainly frigates and carriers, yet more and more kept arriving. The right hand side of the screen showed the depth of space, complete with all the stars that it holds. Cairo station lazily drifted past to her left -her home for the past seven months. Only one vessel was docked to Cairo; The InAmber Clad, that belonged to Captain Keyes. Harper rolled her head to her right and looked up to check the ship's status on the monitors. All was within acceptable limits. She sighed happily, everything was calm and normal, and the covenant, were far, far away.

Harper took another sip of her coffee and casually hit a com button on the control panel in front of her.  
>"How's it going Mike?" She said, speaking into the air around her. A few moments passed as she waited for a reply.<p>

"Checks are nearly done back here." Spoke a young mans voice through the overhead speakers. "I'll be up in a mo."

"Roger." She lazily replied. She pushed the same button again to cut the comms. All was silent again. Only the faint hum of the ships engines and the occasional beep of computers could be heard. Harper drank her coffee and closed her eyes. She felt a bit guilty, relaxing on duty, but there wasn't much else to do. Within seconds of that thought, the radar picked up a contact and gave a small alarm. Harper opened her eyes to the sound and studied the view screen. The starboard camera snapped into view to show a small object heading towards them. Harper instantly set down her coffee in the allocated space to her right and keyed in a couple of commands. The camera zoomed in to reveal the objects identity. It was a lone asteroid. Although it was only about a hundred yards wide, it could still do some damage. She keyed in more commands and the computer calculated the objects trajectory and course. It was on an intercept course with Cairo station. Harper changed the view screen to the front and took control of the sticks. She spun her craft right and locked on to the asteroid, a few hundred feet away. Without hesitating, she thumbed the button on top of the right stick. One of her ASGM-10 missiles raced out to greet the asteroid. Harper watched it on the screen as it impacted and detonated into a beautiful white ball of energy. Once the light diminished, only fragments of rock remained.

"What the hell was that!" Asked Mike over the intercom.

"An asteroid heading for Cairo." She replied. "I had to intercept."

"A little warning might have been nice! I was checking over the missiles when they fired!"

"Sorry Mike, I didn't think." As she said this, the top left corner of the view screen suddenly displayed an incoming transmission.

"Well next time, use your bloody hea-"

"Cairo's calling Mike, gotta take this." She cut him off and switched the com channels over.

"Bravo Zero-four, please report on weapons discharge." Asked a stern, female voice.

"An asteroid was on an intercept course to your location, I didn't think twice about removing it Ma'am."

"Lieutenant, be advised, you're not doing dog fights anymore. Cairo has its own defences against debris. Keep your munitions to yourself, and in the future, report any dangers â€" DO NOT engage without authorisation. Do you understand?"

"Yes Ma'am, It won't happen again."

"Glad to hear it. Now continue your patrol and increase your speed to compensate for the delay. Cairo out."

Harper quickly turned off the comms and keyed in commands to the auto pilot to boost speed and get them back on track. She was angry at the comm.-tech. She had acted on instinct. No one was hurt. Why did she have to get grilled for that?

>The maintenance doors opened, and moments later, Mike was standing in front of the coffee machine at the back of the cabin. Harper leaned round in her seat to face him.<p>

"Are you alright?" She asked. "I didn't mean any harm, I forgot you were there." Mike pushed a few buttons on the machine before answering.

"I'm alright. But like I said before you cut me off; use your head next time." He removed the mug and tasted its contents. "Thankfully," He said as he walked to join her. "I was on the other side of the bay when the missile entered the tube. Had you fired both sets, I think I might have lost my hand."

>He sat down next to her and studied her face.<p>

Harper bit her lower lip with concern, and looked at him with guilt. The computer bleeped a notification to let them know they were back on course. "Anyway," Continued Mike. "It's in the past now. Let's focus on our patrol." He picked up the electronic manuscript and scrolled through it in fine detail.

>Mike was of the same rank as Harper. Lieutenant M. Bowski. Despite having a Russian surname, he was born in Norfolk, England. Trained more in engineering than flying, his job was to keep everything running as smooth as possible, and to let Harper do the flying and fighting.<p>

The Longsword they were aboard, belonged to Harper, and had done a two year service with her. When she was called to join the ranks of Cairo station, she specifically requested that she keep her original Longsword. It was part of her, something that she had grown very much attached to.

Harper's full name was Nicole Amanda Harper. Daughter of Fleet Admiral Jason Harper; she was born in Kent, England. She signed up to be part of the UNSC at the age of twenty-one, graduated in flight school, and served aboard her father's Marathon-class cruiser Wishful Thinking. Now being twenty-four, Nicole had been in sixteen dog fights with the covenant. Her courage and exceptional skill had awarded her numerous medals and rise in ranks. She hoped one day to

command a squadron of her own. But because of the increasing danger the covenant posed, Fleet Admiral Harper persuaded Nicole to leave Wishful Thinking, and to join Cairo station in the defence of Earth. Admiral Harper's fleet would be the first to engage the covenant fleet when they attacked Earth, and he didn't want Nicole to be part of that first wave.

"Did you know the master chief is aboard Cairo?" Asked Mike without looking up.

"There are still Spartans left?" Nicole said in disbelief. "I thought they all died on Reach."

Mike laughed and looked at her. "You don't like to keep up with the times do you Nicki? When Reach fell â€"God bless her soul, The Pillar of Autumn fled and found itself next to an alien ring world crawling with covenant. Well, would you believe it; the master chief blew it up! He found his way back home, and now they are soon to do a commemorative service to congratulate him." He pointed at the view screen. "They will be airing it at 08:00." He checked his watch. "That'll be in just over an hour."

"No harm in tuning in I suppose." Nicole remarked. She picked up her coffee and took a sip, only to realise that it had gone cold. She winched at the taste and stood up to get another. "Is he the last one?" She asked on her way to the coffee machine.

"As far as anyone knows." Mike replied. "At least we still have one though eh?"

"Yeah, but he can't defend Earth all by himself." She chuckled the contents of her mug down the small sink and started to make herself another. "I don't know what good he's going to be in space."

"We'll see soon enough I guess. The covenant's only got Earth left to find. And I doubt that'll happen for a long time."  
>Nicole took her fresh coffee and stood in front of the starboard console. She scanned the displays out of habit; she liked to keep an eye on her ships systems, noting even the smallest fluctuations.<p>

"Hey, which one of these belongs to your father?" Asked Mike as he looked out the port-side windows. Nicole turned to see a large cluster of cruisers and frigates grouping together. She spotted her fathers Marathon-class cruiser at the front of the formation.

"It's the big one leading them. The one with the three vertical blue stripes on it's middle."

"Jesus," Spoke Mike in awe as he got up to take a closer look. "That thing's huge!"  
>Nicole smiled. Her father's ship <em>was<em> impressive. Weighing in at 100,000 tons, with a length of nearly 1,200 meters. All the admirals' ships in the UNSC were of the same class. Big, powerful, and near impossible to destroy.

"It's got two MAC cannons on the front, two oversized Archer missile pods, one on each side. A vast array of 50mm- automatic point defence cannons, and a handful of fusion rockets." Nicole stated proudly.

>Mike whistled long and low, impressed with the armament.<p>

"What about crew and vehicles?" Mike asked, eager to know more.

"I think he has about three hundred staff." She said as she walked over to the same window. "I know there are a few ODSF squads that permanently reside there. As for vehicles, He'll have about ten scorpion tanks, a few dozen warthogs, hornets, pelicans. You know; the usual."

"Longswords?" He enquired.

"Twenty-three. There would normally be twenty-four, but we are currently standing in that one."

"Your father let you take it?" Mike looked at her puzzled.

"He's an admiral, and I'm his daughter." She replied with a smirk.

"Your a lucky bitch is what you are." Laughed Mike.

>The two of them watched the remaining fleet drift slowly by, until Earth could once again be clearly seen behind them. Nicole set down her mug and pulled out a pack of cigarettes. She pulled out two and offered one to Mike. He looked at her puzzled, wondering if she was joking about. Smoking aboard UNSC vessels was strictly forbidden.<p>

"I know you smoke Mr Bowski," She said with a smile. "As soon as you set foot in the mess hall your straight on one."

"Well yeah, but..."

"No buts'. My ship, my rules." She stated, jabbing the cigarette in the air. Mike cautiously took it and put it in his mouth. "I won't tell if you don't." She added. Mike grinned with the cigarette between his teeth.

"I'm so glad I got paired up with you." He laughed.

>Nicole tapped a few buttons on the console in front of her, disabling the smoke alarms and polarizing the windows so that no one outside could see in. Afterwards, she withdrew a small silver lighter from her pocket and lit her cigarette. Mike followed, taking the lighter Nicole offered. The two of them stood for a while and watched their planet, each of them thinking about home and how the war brought them to where they were now. The viewscreen casually beeped and displayed a message in the top right;<p>

\_Incoming transmission:\_

\_Rachel Cota- A1C 1429-34

>Cairo Station ODA-142<br>Naval Channel 12.08\_

Nicole walked over to her seat, leant over the controls and hit the accept key. Rachel's face popped into view in a separate window. She was a young woman, the same age as Nicole. She was wearing her pilot's uniform with her red wavy hair tied back into a standard bun. In the background, it appeared that she was in their quarters as their bunk bed was visible behind her.

>"Morning Nicki." She said with a smile.<p>

Nicole smiled happily back. "Morning Rachel, good to see you. I take it you've only just arrived back at Ciaro?"

"Yeah, not ten minuets ago. Missed this place. Missed you! How's it going?"

Nicole and Rachel had not seen eachother for a week. Rachel was called to ground to help run shipments of men and supplies to and from barracks, while Nicole stayed in space. They talked about the time that had passed, the massing fleet and increased security around Earth, and how those in charge were saying little about it and of what was to come next. Occasionally Mike engaged in the conversations while doing routine checks every now and then. The three of them watched the awards ceremony, and whitnessed the master chief, Avery Johnson and Amanda Keyes recieve their medals.

Half way through the broadcast, Lord Hood recieved an urgent message regarding an aproaching covenant fleet. On Rachels screen, red lights flashed around her and orders could be heard over the staions speakers.

"I have to go Nicki! Shits hit the fan! You take care out there, see you soon!"

"You take care too Rachel!" Pleadet Nicole. "I love you!" As she said that, Rachel's transmission ended, and NAVCOM could be heard over her ships audio.

"All ships fall back to defensive possitions around your stations! Covenant fleet sighted and is en route to Earth. This is not a drill! I repeat; Covenant forces en route to Earth. Fall back to defensive postitions immediatly!"

Mike and Nicole strapped into thier seats and started flipping switches and pushing buttons. Mike restored the alarms, depolarized the windows and primed their weapons. Nicole shut down the auto piolt and hastily turned her Longsword fighter around and headed back towards Cairo station. Hundreds of other Longswords, Pelicans, and other small craft wizzed about in different directions. All heading to their arranged points. Mike and Nicole approached Cairo station and could see pelicans and Longswords launching from the hangar bays. Some entered Earth's orbit and headed to ground, while others proceeded towards bigger vessels. Nicole knew that one of those Pelicans belonged to Rachel, and that she would be sent back to the surface.

They spotted their squadron and took up possistion next to their partner, Bravo 3. Mike opened a channel to them and signed in.

"Hey guys, you ready for this?" He Asked.

A young man by the name of George Bishop answered him. "Me and Will are ready here, good to have you two with us on this one."

There were twelve Longswords asigned to Cairo station, four on alpha team, four on Bravo team, and four on Charlie team. They flew in pairs to help keep eachother covered while fighting. Cairo's Longswords floated around the station, covering all sides. About twenety kilometers ahead sat the Home fleet, ready to take on the

first wave. Cairo soon spoke through the audio to all it's defending ships, ordering them to await the signal before engaging any hostiles. Mike pointed to the viewscreen.

"There they are." He said.

In the distance could be seen dozens of ships, only specks at this range, but definatley Covenant. They just held there, not moving.

"What are they doing?" Asked Nicole in fustration.

"Looks like they're just out of range of the MAC platforms." Responded Mike as he checked the scanners. The entire UNSC home defence sat and waited for the Covenant to make the first move. Minuets slowly ticked by, and Nicole's hands gripped the controls tightly. She was nervous, like the rest of the human race, yet eager to get stuck in and take revenge for all the lives the Covenant had taken. NAVCOM updated them on their enemies movements, informing them that small craft have been detected on fast approach to the Orbital defence platforms. Before long, the Home fleet opened fire. Admiral Harper's cruiser, along with six others, opened fire with their MAC cannons and point defence turrets. Longswords; Some of which were Nicoles old squadron could be seen beginning their attacks.

A few more minuets ticked by as the Covenant craft continued their assault towards the ODPs'. Cairo soon gave the order to engage and destroy all hostiles. Nicole kicked the sticks forward and their ship leaped to life. The Longswords were always the first into battle, and the first point of defence. They were quick, nimble and had the best weaponry suited to dogfights -Nicoles speciality. Her squad flew together until the Covenant craft were just out of weapons range, before they picked their targets and broke formation. Nicole took the first craft she could see; a pair of Seraph fighters, the Covenat equivelant to her Longsword.

"Bravo 3, on me." Nicole spoke over the radio.

"Roger Bravo 4, we're right with you." Responded Will from the other ship. Hundreds of Longswords and Sreaph fighters opened fire on eachother. Plasma and missiles streaked accross space and raced past one another. Early casualties exploded within seconds, and many ships viered off in all directions, giving chase to their targets. Nicole locked onto a Seraph fighter to the right and fired two of her ASGM-10 missiles at it, while Bravo 3 fired its missiles at the other. Nicoles target returned fire for a second before banking sharply upwards. Her missiles lazily followed it, and She rolled her ship to starboard to avoid the plasma. The second Seraph banked left, but was not quick enough to esacpe one of Bravo 3's shots. It's port side exploded and it tumbled out of control. Nicole looped her ship upwards and tracked down her target. Her Missiles had missed. It weaved from left to right and tried to skim past other ships and running rings around their station. Nicole's flying kept pace, and every free shot she took advantage of with her machine guns. A few rounds here and there nipped at the back end of the Covenant vessel. The chase lasted a few minuets as ships blew up all aound her. She was a confident and talented fighter, in a sense, becomming the Longsword herself. Bravo 3 terrorised any other Covenant ship that came into range, and kept a close eye on their team mate's six. Nicole destroyed the Seraph fighter and the pair tracked down one

target after the next.

Before long, Cairo's MAC cannon opened fire, along with Athens and Malta's. The Covenant fleet was advancing.

## 2. Chapter 2

**\*\*Chapter 2\*\***

08:10 October 20th 2552 (Military calendar)

>Aboard Cairo orbital defence platform<br>In high orbit above Earth

The corridors of Cairo station were flooded with red light as Rachel Cota ran towards hangar bay B. Luckily she hadn't gotten changed since she arrived on the station no less than an hour ago, and she had already donned her helmet. Service men and women scrambled to their posts, while crewmen fumbled with their tasks of locking down sections and setting up precautionary defences in case the station was boarded. Cota skidded round corners and followed the hangar icons painted on the deck. Four minutes later, she rounded her final corner and entered the bay. Pelicans were launching one after the other, full with navy personnel. Rachel ran straight for her own Pelican; Tango two-nine. It sat on its own to the right hand side of the bay. She jumped in the back to find a large squad of soldiers and some crewmen already strapped in.

"C'mon pilot, let's go!" One of them yelled. Cota rushed to the cockpit and slid the door open. She entered, closed the door and quickly buckled down, starting her bird's engines in the process. The stabilizers flared bright blue and her ship rose off the deck. She punched a button to close the troop bay doors and awaited clearance to leave the station. Almost instantly she was given the green light to proceed. Rachel leant on the sticks and raced her Pelican out of Cairo and into orbit. As she dove towards the surface, she opened a channel to the back of the ship and asked what her destination was.

"North Mobassa lady. To Fell's garrison, along side Tudor Creek. You know it?" Asked a gruff man.

"Yeah I know of it" Replied Rachel. "Get comfortable, we may be a while."

"Be as quick as you can pilot, we need to be ready for when those bastards touch down after us."

"Understood." Finished Rachel.

They were essentially free-falling straight down to the African continent. As they entered the atmosphere, the nose of their pelican began to glow red with heat, like all vessels that entered Earth. After a few minutes the heat wave cleared and they dove towards the clouds. Rachel shuffled in her seat. All she could do was keep her Pelican level and glide it in. During this time her thoughts were back with Nicole, wondering if she was ok, how many Covenant she had killed already, and whether or not she was dead yet. She shook off that last thought. It was one thing they swore never to think about. "\_Positive thinking Rachel.\_" Is what Nicole had said to her when



they joined the war. "\_Possitive thinking with see us through.\_" Rachel could see the smile on her partners face, and she too smiled beneath her polarized visor. Spured back into confidence, Rachel gripped the sticks and focused on the job at hand; getting these soldiers back to their barracks, and stopping the Covenant from taking Earth.

Twenty minuets later and they were flying alongside Tudor creek, one of two main bodies of water that separtate the Mombassa mainland from New Mombassa Island and the Orbital elevator. Her Nav computer marked the base's location on her console, and she followed it with pin point accuracy, bearing north over the old city, and into the hills. Moments later, she keyed a comm to the base to inform them that she had their men and requested a landing.

"Pad four Tango two-nine." Responded a middle aged female voice. "I'll light it up for you now."

Two other pelicans were already there on landing pads two and three. Pad four lit up with white flashing lights, and Rachel guided her bird towards it. She gently touched it down and pushed a button to open the troop bay doors. The gruff man from the back opened a channel to the cockpit and thanked her for the ride. She cut the power and felt the Pelican slouch on it's landing gear. Rachel sighed and sat there for a moment, looking out through the windshield at the Kenyan hills around her. It was a bright sunny day, and the only chunks of cloud dotted the sky. She unbuckled her harness and exited the back of the ship. Ahead of her was the compound. It sat upon one of the highest hills in the area and had a fantastic view of New and Old Mombassa. The base consisted of three main buildings to her right, one was ops, with the UNSC flag flying high. Another building was barracks, and the last was a field hospital. On the other side of the landing pads were the vehicle depots', two large double garages joined together. The squad that rode with her were hastily talking to a CO not ten feet away, and warthogs with trailers were pulling up to the landing pads, loaded with minuitions. She strode over to the squad, eager to know what was going on.  
>"You the pilot?" The CO asked as he spotted her. Rachel depolarized her visor so that he could see her and gave him a salute.<p>

"Rachel Cota, Airman first class." She replied. "Whats the plan sir?"

"We have been informed that moments ago, that the orbital defence platforms Malta and the Athens have been destroyed. The covenant is headed here right now." He stated.

Rachels face went pale. "And the Cairo?" She asked.

"Still fireing as far as we know. The covenant boarded the stations and destroyed them from the inside. The covenant fleet isn't far away. We are loading up the Pelicans with men and hogs, then joining the rest of the militia in Old mombassa, five clicks from here. We're gunna set up shop and take em out as soon as they land."

"My Pelicans yours sir." She said inistantly. "What have you got for me?"

"We'll load you up again with this squad; the 812th battalion and a Gauss hog. You will fly with Pelicans; Hotel five-four, and Lima

two-two who have silmilar armaments. You set them down on the beach south of the sea walls and dust off back here. Got it?"

Rachel snapped another salute. "Yes sir!"

"Good. Lets get to it." He turned back to the marines next to her. "Give em Hell." He ended.

"You got it boss." Stated the gruff man. "Alright people, let's go!" He shouted, clapping his hands together to spur them on. Cota and the squad ran back to the Pelican and got inside. A single marine drove a Guass hog underneath the tail end of her Pelican and spoke to her over a private com as he exited the vehicle.

"Dropship Tango Two-nine, Gauss hog ready when you are." He told her.

"Roger that marine." Replied Rachel. She keyed the magnetic clamps and the warthog 'clinked' into possition.

"Pelican dropship Lima Two-Two, ready." Came accross the wide band radio.

"Pelican dropship Hotel Five-Four. Ready." Spoke the second.

Rachel Cota fired up her engines, flipped the comms and also signed in ready.

>"All Pelicans dust off, you are clear to launch. Good luck. Fell's Garrison out." Ended the base's Comm-tech.<p>

All three Pelicans rose and turned in unison to face their designated direction, and together they fley off towards the city. On the way there, Rachel looked up through the overhead windshield and could see faint flashes of light in the sky; a sign that things in orbit were not going well. It didn't take long for the trio of Pelicans to arrive at their destination. Across the beach, other Pelicans were flying away, back to their own bases after dropping off thier cargo. A handful of other wathogs and a few scorpion tanks could be seen driving up the beach to the highway not far away. Marines of both sexes were running around setting up AA batteries and gun turrets. Some were building sandbag walls and others were issuing orders to certain individuals. The three pelicans hovered side by side and released their warthogs. The soldiers piled out the back a fanned out around the dropships. Some drove the hogs away to join the others, and some grouped up with other marines. As soon as everyone was clear, Rachel and the other ships took off verticaily and spun back to base.

It was quiet again in her dropship as she followed the other two infront. A small group of UAVs' rocketed past them at incredible speeds, no doubt checking the progress of the preperations. The UAVs' wern't much smaller than their Pelicans', but had a longer wingspan and alot more speed. ONI used them to keep track of enemy movements and were invaluable to scouting missions. "\_A cushy desk job for some spook behind a remote control.\_" Thought Rachel. Not ten minuets later, they were touching down again at Fell's Garrison.

"Welcome back boys and girls." The Comm-tech said soon after they powered down. "Don't get too comfortable. Once your re-fueled your straight back out there."

"Hardly enough time to take a piss..." Mumbled Rachel under her breath.

### 3. Chapter 3

**\*\*Chapter 3\*\***

10:16 20th October 2552 (Military calendar)

>Aboard Longsword fighter Bravo 4<br>In High orbit above Earth

Bravo team had a combined kill count of twenty-seven, but had lost four ships themselves. Charlie team was the only team to have one member left. They linked with the last three of Alpha team to keep them four men strong. Bravo 1 and Bravo 2 had to return to Cairo to rearm.

"Longswords," Spoke the station. "Malta's been boarded. The Covenant have attaching craft the the stations. Find them, take them out."

Mike and Alpha teams signed in, acknowledging the order. The teams swooped in tight around Cairo station, each pair an even distance apart. They ducked, rolled and flipped around obstacles and other craft, ignoring the Seraph fighters and engaging nothing but the boarding vessels as they approached. Some slipped passed and quickly locked onto the platform. Nicole dipped under two dead pelicans and debris, locked onto a boader and lanced out with a simple missile. Bravo 4 copied the manouever. Everyone was low on amunition and had to make use of their weapons. The boarding craft exploded in balls of soundless white light before drifting away in lazy circles.

"We only have one missile left." Called Bravo 3 over the radio.

"We have two. Call in to rearm will. We'll escort you in." Responded Nicole.

"Roger that."

Nicole slowed and let Bravo 3 take the lead back to the docking bay. The pair of Longswords swayed together amongst the dead bodies and twisted metal, occastionally taking the odd pot shot with their machine guns. The UNSC cruisers were still firing their MACs , but now they were firing at the Covenant Battlecruisers. Gigantic trails of plasma now raced accross the void of space, impacting Capital ships and vaporizing smaller craft. Cairo continued its vicious onslaught. The ODP had scored more kills than anything else so far. As Bravo 3 came close to the docking bay, a Seraph bee-lined towards George and Will from the right and struck a plasma bomb to their ribs. The Longsword lurched left from the blow and tumbled away from the station. Nicole and mike tracked the attacker and chased the Seraph as it came about for another hit. Nicole opened up with the machine gun and fired her last two missiles at the fighter. They streaked plumes of smoke and gained on the figher. Just before the missiles impacted, the Seraph fired another plasma bomb at the tumbling Bravo 3. All projectiles detonated at the same time, and both vessels floated in bits, peacefully.

Bravo 3 was gone. Nicole kept a stern face as she continued to dodge

fire and debris. Mike was silent, he stared into nothing. Will and George were two of his closest friends, he knew this day would come, but he never expected it to. Nicole swallowed hard, she felt his pain but had to stay focused or they would both die too. The radio crackled and introduced its self.

"Nicole, it's your father."

"Dad?" She kept her eyes on flying but her face changed entirely.

"Nicole I need you on the surface. I'm not losing you out here."

"But Dad, I'm needed out here!" She insisted.

"And I need you alive! Nicole please. Just dive to the surface, now."

Nicole stiffened, momentarily flying straight.

"Nicole!" He urged.

She was silent for a moment more before answering.  
>"Yes father." She sniffed.<p>

The radio went dead and Nicole looked at Mike. He was still shaken up but managed to nod to her. She turned the sticks hard to the right and dived into orbit, occasionally straffing to avoid tumbling objects on the way down. She did not have to worry about Seraphs chasing her here, as they couldn't maneuver in an atmosphere. No word from Cairo meant that her father; Admiral Harper, had overruled any objections they may have had about her retreat. He was a stern man, yet extremely soft when it came to his family. His reasons were acceptable in the eyes of a father, looking out for his little girl's safety. He had once tried to dissuade her from joining the corps, but she was determined to sign up. After that, he could only do what he could to keep her safe.

Nicole kicked on the steering lock. Thousands of kilometers ahead of her was the African continent, and somewhere down there, was Rachel. She sighed and let the G-forces hold her in her chair. She let her limbs go limp and allowed herself a few minutes to relax. Mike dropped his head and took the time to grieve.

#### 4. Chapter 4

**\*\*Chapter 4\*\***

10:00 20th October 2552 (Military calendar)  
>Foxhole Delta, Old Mombassa South. <p>

Private P. Mordy pressed his foot down on the brakes as he approached the main gates to the compound. The guard immediately let him through without hesitation. Word of the Covenant threat spread fast, and every marine on Earth was on high alert. He accelerated behind the fences and sandbags and sped past buildings and manned AA turrets that aimed impatiently at the sky. Two minutes later, and Mordy was pulling up behind another warthog. Alongside a long row of open tents

and netted canopies. As he cut the engine, he didn't bother to get out. He looked left, to a group of marines; his squad. Mordy stroked his goatie as a young woman aproached.

"Heya Pete," She said as she got close.

"Amy." Pete nodded.

Amy Huddleson was a Captain, and in this instance, was the leader of the squad. She leant a hand on the warthogs roll cage, and spoke to her friend.

"Your back just in time." She said. "I take it the delivery went ok?"

"Running mail's never a challenge. It's just boring as hell. Not once on the journey did the guy speak a word."

>Pete had run an ONI official back to the Office of Naval Inteligence headquarters, ten clicks away.<p>

"Well it looks like we'll see plenty of excitment today." She announced as she tapped on the chasis with her fist. "Lets load you up." She walked away and spoke briefly to the rest of the team. Corporal Huddleson had lead her team for the last three years, and everyone in it was as close as family. Pete waved to the driver of the other warthog; another woman by the name of Laura Bevan. She welcomed him back and climbed into her own Warthog ahead of him. Her passenger hopped into her side seat. That was Louise Dark. Private Joe Haru secured the rocket launchers and ammunition to the rear gun mount and climbed in.

All around them, other squads were preparing thier vehicles, and completing the compuonds defences. The compound held around two hundred men, and only accomodated tewnty Warthogs and five Scorpion tanks. It was more a barracks and training ground, than a military stronghold. Amy Jumped into Mordy's passenger seat and briefed him on the situation. Another close friend and team mate was Chris Isuma, who was just fastening the last of everyones pack's and supplies to the LAAG gun on the back.

"We're good to go." He announced.

Pete and Laura started their engines and put their 'Hogs into gear. Amy recieved instructions from Command and updated her team.

"We are heading to a cliff edge six kilometers, on the nothern side of the mountain." She said.

"Roger that K'." Radioed Laura, who accelerated towards the north gate. Pete followed her as Amy singed in thier team to Command and to let them know that they are en route to their destination. Very few people knew Amy's other name, and so only the initial is ever used; K'.

Within minutes, the two Warthogs were tearing up the Kenyan plains, kicking up dust in their wake. No wildlife was present out here anymore, of it at all, very sparse. Five hundred years of development and over population caused most of nature to become non existant.

>They traveled up the side of the mountain, four clicks north east,

before climbing up to the cliff edge. They parked opposite each other, back to back, with their noses aligned to the nearest exit in case an evac was necessary and they had to split up. The cliffside road was over ten meters wide until it hit a steep hill. The passengers exited and unpacked their rocket launchers and carried an ammo crate together up the hill, to where they would be positioned. Louise and Amy sat on the hill side and laid their launchers by their sides. Pete and Laura unclipped their assault rifles from their seats and crouched behind the bonnet of their vehicles. ONI had forecasted the Covenant attack to come from a specific vector, if they were to attack this part of the city.<p>

"What's the likelihood of this attack hitting here K'?" Asked Isuma over the Comms.

"I don't know Chris. I don't even know if they've broken through the ODP's yet. Just stay frosty ok?" She replied.

No one knew when Covenant fleet would strike. Or if at all where. All the UNSC could do was set up shop, and be patient. Their barracks could just be seen to the east. Most of the base was shrouded in dust. Kicked up from all the vehicles that exited the compound. Ahead was the Tudor Creek, and beyond that; New Mombassa.

## 5. Chapter 5

**\*\*Chapter 5\*\***

10:04 20th October 2552 (Military calendar)  
>Central New Mombassa, District 4.<br>Aboard Pelican dropship Tango Two-Nine

Rachel lowered her pelican onto the road outside one of the city's local libraries and opened the troop bay doors. Thousands of people crowded the streets, and the New Mombassa police department had a hard time keeping them in order. Rachel and her pelican were among hundreds that dotted the city, in the effort to evacuate the population. The pelicans' weight counter began rolling over as the civilians piled on board. She could only squeeze in fifty people at a time, and she didn't know how long she would be able to remain on evac duty before the covenant arrived and her ship was needed elsewhere. Trains, commercial jets, and boats were taking people as far away as possible. Rachel's stop was Mogongo, about a twenty minute trip west out of Kenya.

>A breathless cop radioed to Rachel and told her to close the troop bay and lift off as he held back desperate civilians that were literally fighting to escape the city. She did as she was told and was rising through the air, when something in the distance caught her eye. It was small at first, but grew larger at an alarming rate. Rachel gasped and cursed in disbelief as she realised what it was. A covenant carrier soared overhead and came to a standstill directly above them and the city. The public on the ground screamed and panicked. They ran in all directions, pushing each other out of the way as they barged onto waiting ships. Cota didn't want to hang around. She was only thirty feet from the ground before she changed from vertical thrust to horizontal. She blasted off at full speed west, under the carrier itself. It took a few minutes to get clear of the gigantic ship, and for every second, she was petrified that they would be shot down. Phantoms' and Banshees' launched from its hangar

bays, thankfully miles away from them And strange beetle like vehicles, the size of buildings were litterally dropping from the underneath of it's hull. Rachel didn't stop to wonder what they were or what they could do. She just flew straight and fast, leaving New Mombassa and its occupants to their fate. For now, there was nothing she could do. She had about fifty people safe with her, she hoped that many more would make it out in time.<p>

After an agonizing trip, Rachel landed at her destination; Moi International airport. She hastily tapped the button that opened the troop bay and watched the weight counter slowly revert back to a comfortable level. Other Pelicans arrived from different directions and hundreds of civilians poured out onto the sun baked ground and tarmac. The local authorities were shepharding people onto busses that would take them to safety. Once Rachel's weight counter came back to her normal estimate, she knew she was empty. She waited a minute to let everyone get clear of her engines before she lifted off again. Her orders from Fell's Garrison were to help with the evacuation of New Mombassa and that she would be notified if she was needed elsewhere. She flew back the way she had come, another twenty lonely minutes. Although this time, she was extra vigilant. Her ship had no weapons, and if she ran into trouble, she would either have to ditch her ship, or die with it. About ten minutes into her return flight, she could see several plumes of smoke rising from New and Old Mombassa city. Rachel didn't want to go in there, but those people needed her. She decided to fly low to the ground to avoid being spotted, and to make her a difficult target for the Covenant to track. Within minutes she was skimming the surface of Tudor creek and fast approaching the shoreline and harbour. Green smoke began to lazily drift up from behind the docks. She had been spotted, and whoever lit the flare needed her help. Rachel would never deny anyone help. She rose over the roof tops and was greeted by a small squad of marines and she estimated a dozen civilians. The civilians were cowering behind a few cargo trucks, and the marines were trying to hold off a small army of Grunts and jackals from the other side of crates and forklifts'. Behind the marines and the civilians, was a clearing big enough for her to land, and right next to it was the flare. As she passed overhead, a marine threw a grenade towards the covenant. She had just enough time to see the grenade explode and send a few jackals tumbling backwards, before she landed with her back towards the refugees'. She opened the troop bay and heard a marine come across the radio.

"Pilot," The marine stated. "Get these refugees' the hell outta here!" She said. The marine sounded brusque, but it was to be expected when fighting the Covenant. Machine gun fire blared away in the background.

"You got it." Rachel replied. The weight counter once again began rolling over until the troop bay comm was activated. A shaken civilian spoke through to her.

"We're all in. Please hurry." He said.

"Sit down and hold on. You'll be safe in no time." She replied.

The comm was silent, and Rachel rose her pelican off the deck. She flew off in a wide circle back the way she came, leaving the squad of marines to continue their fight. Just like her journey towards the city, Cota stayed low to the ground and flew as fast as her old bird

could fly. She knew that with every rescue, the situation would become more and more dangerous.

## 6. Chapter 6

**\*\*Chapter 6\*\***

11:00 20th October 2552 (Military calendar)

>Nine thousand feet above the African continent<br>Aboard Longsword fighter Bravo 4

The Covenant Carrier was clearly visible hovering over the province of New Mombassa. Nicole wished she had a few Shiva nuclear warheads to drop on top of it, but for now she could only fly by and hope that the corps had a plan for it. Fires and explosions dotted the landscape ahead of them. Mike had put aside his grief and was searching for a landing strip big enough to accommodate them via his console.

"Found anywhere?" Asked Nicole.

"Only the obvious New Mombassa airport." He replied while still keying in possible locations.

"What's wrong with the airport? Commercial runways have plenty of room for us."

"Not when it's controlled by the Covenant it's not." Mike stated.

"Jesus." Cursed Nicole. "They only landed an hour ago and already they have control of over half the city!"

Mike brought up the co-ordinates for a hill top base with multiple landing zones on the main screen. A picture of the base popped up in the lower left corner of the screen, along with a brief bio of the ships it catered for and the base's current situation.

"There. Fell's Garrison. No Covenant activity yet. They can accommodate our size." He told her.

"Give me a NAV point." She insisted. "Call them and let them know we're on our way." Nicole glanced at the bio and scanned over the inventory. Dropship Tango two-nine was listed and instantly grabbed her attention. "Rachel..." She whispered. Her heart skipped a beat and she pushed her Longsword's engines to their limit. Mike tapped a few commands and within seconds, an orange triangle appeared on screen ahead of them, on top of the hills about fifty kilometers away. A distance counter rapidly decreased next to the NAV marker as she raced towards it.

Her face was a cross between determination and worry. She had to get to Fell's Garrison as quickly as possible. Mike picked up on her anxiety and asked her what was wrong.

>"Rachel's stationed there." She said. She looked over at him as she spoke. "I need to see her. Make sure she's alright."<p>

"I know," He said. "We will be there in little over twelve minutes." He reassured her. He hit the comm button overhead and punched in the



base's ID to open a channel. "Fell's Garrison, this is the Longsword interceptor Bravo 4 from Cario ODP, requesting emergency landing to refuel and re-arm. Do you read me? Over."

>Fell's Garrison replied within seconds, granting their request and giving them authorisation to use pad 5, reserved for larger vessels.<p>

As soon as Nicole and Mike arrived at the base, Nicole quickly killed the engines and hastily unbuckled her harness. She ran to the back of the cockpit, hurried down the interior ramp and palmed the hatch release button on the wall. The exit ramp slowly lowered to the ground and she jumped out onto the tarmac. Mike followed but found that he did not have the spirit to catch up with her. Marines were already pulling up to the Longsword with fuel tankers and ammunition carts. Mike gave up the chase and watched Nicole disappear into the ops building. He turned to greet the marines and supervised them in refueling and rearming her ship.

Nicole crashed through the door to the ops building and stopped in her tracks. Four men turned to face her and the colonel in charge of the base confronted her.

"Flight Lieutenant Harper, I presume?" He began.

Nicole gave him a quick salute before hastily asking her own question.

>"Where's Cota?" She cried.<p>

"I beg your pardon?" Exclaimed the colonel.

Nicole realised she had stepped over the line and opened her mouth before thinking. She quickly apologised.

>"I'm sorry sir," She said. "I need to find Airman First class, Rachel Cota. She's, a friend of mine. I saw her Pelican's ID was linked to this outpost."<p>

The colonel looked down at the console next to him and checked the register. He looked at her sideways with questionable judgement.

>"Dropship Tango two-nine? Yes, she's linked to this outpost."<p>

"Could you tell me where she is please sir?" Asked Nicole. She had to fight the need for urgency and remain respectful.

"She's out ferrying refugees to Moi International airport, north east of here." He faced her again and straightened his back. "However, I think there are more pressing concerns right now. Don't you?"

Nicole was about to respond when one of the ops at the console interrupted.

"Colonel. Two Phantoms are approaching from the north east. ETA six minutes."

"Just like that." Said the colonel. He turned and leant over the desk, looking out of the window at the air field beyond. He spoke into the PA system to the base. "Marines, lock and load. We've got visitors inbound from the north east." He paused a moment. "Let's make them comfortable shall we?" He punched a button to the air raid siren

and stood tall again, facing Nicole. "You got a gun, pilot?"

"Sir, yes sir." She said.

"Then I think it's time you used it." He gave her a nod, to which Nicole responded with a simple salute. She turned around and ran back out the door towards her ship. The bases occupants began manning the few AA turrets around the air field, and some took up positions under cover. Mike and the the four marines with him were trying their best to finnish the job at hand. Nicole ran up to them and told them how long until the Covenant arrived. She continued past them and back into her Longsword. Against the wall, just inside was a weapons rack that held a couple of assault rifles. She unclipped them and detatched a few sactchels of extra clips. Nicole then palmed the door controls and ran back outside as the ramp closed behind her.

"How much longer?" She asked Mike, handing him a rifle and amunition.

"Only a few minuets." He said as he took the weapon. "Most of the fuel is onboard, and we have three more missles to load in. Your 50. cal is fully loaded too."

"Good." Replied Nicole. "Once the reload teams are done, we'll fall back with them and wait for the Covenant to arrive. I just hope they don't blow up my plane when they get here."

"We'll make sure they don't." Reasured Mike.

"Your 85% full Lueitenant." Reported the marine who sat in the tanker cab next to them.

Nicole thanked him before feeling Mikes hand on her shoulder.  
>"Did you find out where Rachel was?" He asked.<p>

Nicole looked up at him. "Yeah," She said. "Shes evacuating refugees from the city center. If it's alright with you, I'd like to track her down after we're done here."  
>Mike gave her a pat on her shoulder.<p>

"You got it." He said with a nod.

Nicole removed the clip in her rifle, checked the rounds and slid the magazine back into the stock. She cocked the lever and watched the ammo counter read full. Mike did the same and pocketed two clips from his satchel.  
>"How many phantoms are we expecting?"<p>

"Two." answered Nicole, watching the skies.

"So we're looking at twenty five, thirty Covenant. not including the gunners or pilots." He calculated.

"Sounds about right." She agreed. "Grunts' I can deal with. Jackal's are the stubborn ones."

"And, there's gotta be at least two Eletes'." Mike added.

"Yeah, they're gunna be a problem. I havn't seen a single sniper rifle on this base yet." Nicole remarked.

The marine with the fuel hose disconnected it from the Longsword while the one in the cab notified them that they were full. The marines further down gave them the thumbs up to signal that all missiles were also good to go.

"We're heading back to the depot," Announced the driver as his passenger climbed in next to him. "Hop on, we'll give you a lift."

>Mike and Nicole stepped up to either side of the cab and held onto the rails as the tanker turned around and drove fifty yards west to the fuel depot. The munitions wagon headed east, towards the garages and store rooms. It was a brief journey, but quicker than running. Everyone exited the vehicle just in time to hear the two Phantoms approaching. Almost instantly, the AA guns opened fire on the enemy ships, and were welcomed back by lashes of plasma fire. Within seconds, two of the three AA guns were melted and useless. The third AA gun was targeted next, and it too was turned into molten slag. Nicole, Mike, and the marines from the tanker quickly slid into cover and out of sight. They watched and waited as the two phantoms hovered over the empty landing pads. The cin mounted plasma cannons swayed left and right, looking for targets. The undersides of the Phantoms glowed pink, and transport beams shone down to the floor. Moments later, Grunts' and jackals' drifted down and began spreading out over the open ground, followed by four Eletes'. An eerie silence held for a while, and only the Air raid siren filled the air. The two Phantoms spun around and headed back the way they had come, leaving their troops to fend for themselves.<p>

One grenade tumbled through the air, thrown by a marine who hid behind some parked cars. It landed close to the Covenant, and once it detonated, the whole base came alive.

## 7. Chapter 7

**\*\*Chapter 7\*\***

10:45 20th October 2552 (Military calendar)

>Kenyan cliff top, 4 Kilometers West of Foxhole Delta<br>Old Mombassa South

Haru and Isuma had shot down three Banshees' since the Covenant carrier arrived in the city. The squad of Banshees were the first scouting party that ventured south east of New Mombassa. The two marines had no difficulty in dealing with them. Louise and Amy didn't even need to fire their launchers. The first sighting was over half an hour ago, and things were dead still. Out over the water, about fifteen kilometers away, New Mombassa Island was being hit hard. Several explosions dotted the island, and ships; water based and air, were evacuating the city.

"Bastards." Growled Pete into his helmet's microphone.

"Easy Mordy," Cautiously replied Amy from the hill behind him. "There's nothing we can do for those civilians from here."

"There must be \_something \_we can do K'." Spoke Laura from her warthog. "We've effectively been watching the population get massacred for nearly an hour."

"I'm sorry Laura but no. If the Covenant try to spread this way into the rest of Africa, we are only one of the few teams out here to stop them. Or at the very least, warn the next city. I know it's painful, but we have our orders."

The team fell silent for a while, simply watching and waiting. Amy wanted to be out there just as much as the rest of her team. She too wanted to make a difference, and she could only pray that things would pick up. Many marines in the UNSC never wanted to experience a confrontation with the Covenant, but her squad were brave, determined, and were full of hate for the Covenant forces. Amy hoped that their wishes came true.

>After a further ten minuets of no action, Louise knocked Amy in the shoulder and pointed a little eastward into the sky.<p>

"K' look, are those Phantoms?" She asked.

Amy pulled a scope from her pocket and took a look at the targets. Her image magnified and focused to reveal that they were indeed Phantoms. Two of them, heading for the mountain top.

"Your right Darky." Amy said as she lowered her scope. "They're heading for the top of the mountain. They would'nt have spotted us from that range."

"Is there an outpost up there or something?" Louise asked.

"I believe so. But they would already know that the Covenant were comming."

"They had better be prepared..." Stated Louise, watching the two Phantoms drift past.

## 8. Chapter 8

**\*\*Chapter 8\*\***

11:32 20th October 2552 (Military calendar)

>New Mombassa outskirts, en route to city center<br>Aboard Pelican dropship Tango-29

Rachel Coata had dropped off her last group of refugees' and was flying through the residential parts of New Mombassa. The fight on the ground had grown phenominally over the past hour. Yet it seemed that with every pass Rachel took, the number of covenant kept increasing. Her Pelican was dotted with traces of plasma fire, over both her port and starboard sides. The covenant had forced their way into buildings and had scored hits on her from the roof tops and open balconies. A swarm of Buggers had even burnt a few holes through her forward windshield. Thankfully, her ship could fly faster than they could, and she escaped their weapons within seconds. Fell's Garrison had reported an attack on the outpost, and urged all Pelicans' to stay clear of the base and await instructions. Rachel was alone onboard her ship. The motion tracker was off the scale, and the Covenant were on all sides. She only had a simple weapons cache, and now her fuel tank was less than half full. She Kept herself moving, keeping the Pelican at just over half speed. Fast enough to evade the enemy, yet not so fast that she would run out of fuel any time soon.

Although Rachel believed she had about an hours worth of flight time remaining.

A few thuds echoed through the hull on the port side. Rachel's eyes looked to her left at the wall as warning tones bleeped hysterically. She watched the wall for a few seconds- nothing melted through. She sighed and focused on flying again. there was no where for her to go. The skies were full of Banshees' and Phantoms' and the ground was crawling too. Among the tall buildings at least, she was partially hidden from above, and hopefully out of range from below. The open radio was a mess. Full of tactical information, warnings, encounters and so on, all from different parts of the city. Then in an instant, things changed to what seemed to be one subject.

"What is that?"

"Ma'am, we have a slipspace signature."

"This cant be happening."

"Inside the city?"

"Check your sources luitenant."

"Will someone tell be whats going on?"

"592.885, Drones' confirm. Target will jump."

"Get them outta there!"

Rachel's face was a wash with worry and confusion. All the voices were agitated and stressed even more than usual. She didn't know what was happening. A Blue-white glow rippled in the distance, beyond the buildings. She caught glimps of it from time to time, and as she broke out over a highway, she realised what everyone was talking about. The Covenant Carrier was moving forward, engulfed from the nose with a blue slipspace tear. It only took a second for Rachel to realise what was about to happen. Not only would the carrier jump into slipspace this close to the ground, but it would also emit a natural EMP! She quickly turned right and flew away from the vessel, pushing the throttle as far as it could go. Shouts and screams were heard over the radio, too many voices to keep up with. A second later, and the air shook around her. Rachel glanced at the rear view monitor and saw the bluey-white shockwave racing outwards towards her. The carrier was gone, and ruin was all that was left. The Pelican was going as fast as it could, and Rachel had cleared the buildings to fly straight over them. Each time she looked at the rear monitor, the wave was closer, so close, that she could see the electons firing in its field. She gritted her teeth and tried to force her plane ever faster, even leaning a little out of her seat as she did so. Before long, she felt static on the back of her neck. And then her controls went dead.

Her Pelican was shot forward, pointing downward, as if the shockwave had batted her tail end upwards, like a small child swatting away a fly. Rachel Grabbed a support above her and the arm of her seat. She cried out and screamed as her Pelican rolled upside down and tagged the top of a tall building. The world outside spun and Racel closed her eyes, bracing herself for the impact she feared most. She fell for what seemed like ages. Her stomach lifed in her body, and she

felt sick. Tears streamed from her closed eyes, and her arms and legs ached as she braced herself against the floor and ceiling. The pelican landed heavily on its roof as it smashed through the top of a three-story building.

The harness that held Rachel in her chair had done its job. She hung there a moment, listening to the ringing in her ears. She had never crashed a ship before, and the shock had stunned her. It was only the blood pressure building up in her head that snapped her out of her daze. She groaned and fought with the harness buckle. It was dark in the cockpit, and the rubble around the ship blocked out the midday sun. Eventually she was let loose and dropped to the ceiling. Rachel picked herself up but staggered backwards into the bulkhead. She steadied herself and removed her helmet, letting it fall to the floor. She patted herself down and was relieved to find no injuries from the crash. After forcing open the cockpit door to the troop bay, Rachel plucked the battle rifle out from next to the pilot's chair, along with the evac bag. She threw the bag over her shoulders, and checked the rifle was loaded. In her evac bag contained five extra clips for the battle rifle, three frag grenades, an M6C pistol with two clips, a standard med kit, a short wave radio, and enough food and water to last her a few days. The troop bay doors were already ajar when Rachel approached them. She crouched next to the opening and peered outside. The sky was awash with blue and white particles, like harmless sparks floating in the wind. Everything was quiet, and Rachel suspected that the EMP had knocked out everything else in the city too. She looked back at the cabin, and said her goodbyes to her Pelican. It was natural for a pilot to get attached to their aircraft, but to lose one, felt like losing someone special. Rachel swallowed her sorrow and took a deep breath. She squeezed through the opening and out into the sunlight.

Following the tail of the Pelican, Rachel climbed onto the roof of the building. Her Pelican, belly up, was a sorry sight, and she knew that her bird would never fly again. She crouched behind the tip of the tail and scanned the surrounding roof tops for any enemy activity. Everything was eerily quiet, and once Rachel felt safe that nothing was watching her, she bolted for a door not far away. This was the roof access door. The stairs beyond it would lead her into the interior of the structure. She tried to push open the door but found it was locked from the other side. A swift boot to the lock soon gained her entrance. The door swung open and Rachel hurried inside, rifle raised, checking all corners. It was incredibly dark in the building. The EMP had shorted out everything. For how long though, was a different question. Standing at the top of the stair well, Rachel tried to turn on the flashlight attached to her rifle. That was dead too. She slung the rifle over her shoulder and removed her pack. Crouching in the semi dark, she opened the pack and removed the M6C pistol and loaded it. After securing the pack again, she stood up and took hold of the stair rail with her left hand. With the pistol in her right, she slowly and silently began her descent into the building.

## 9. Chapter 9

**\*\*Chapter 9\*\***

11:35 20th October 2552 (Military calendar)  
>Kenyan mountains, UNSC outpost: Fells Garrison<br>Old Mombassa

The shields of the last eliet fell, leaving it's body open to welcome the thirty-odd rounds that followed. The covenant pawn staggered and fell to it's knees, unable to breath. Seconds later, it hit the tarmac with a wet 'scwelch'. The outpost gave a short sigh of relief to thier victory. Although the staion had recived six casualties, they had survived the first wave relatively unscathed.

>The colonel reloaded his assualt rifle and addressed the base. "Thats just round number one ladies and gentleman!" He began in a loud voice. "Soon there'll be more of 'em! I want two rocket 'hogs' to head eight hundred yards north east. Roast those sons' o' bitches before they even get here!"<p>

"Colonel! Sir! The city!" Yelled one marine with urgency. The platoon all turned to see the covenant carrier engulfed in the blue rip of a slipspace rupture. Before long, the carrier jumped and took a portion of the city with it. The shockwave domed ouwards and spread with terrifying speed. The EMP field died out half way accross the city.

"They're leaving?" Asked a young private. She shook her head in disbelief.

"No, I think this is just the beginning." Stated Mike with a stern face.

"It may just be the beginning, but they left us a window. Undoubtably a very brief window, but one non the less." The Colonel said. He surveyed his base and the men and women that were around him. "I want all teams standing by. Command will probably need us to help clean up before re-enforcements arrive in the city. So load up the 'hogs, fetch your packs, and await further instruction." As the marines scattered to the barracks and vehicle depots' The colonel searched for Nicole and Mike. Once he found thier gaze, he nodded and spoke to them. "Your bird is going to be an invaluable asset today. I know you won't let us down."

"You can count on us Sir." Saluted Nicole. A weak smile creased the corners of the colonel's mouth. He nodded approvingly at them. "Drop a bomb for me." He said before he began walking back to the comms building. Nicole and Mike turned and paced back to their Longsword. They had walked all of a few steps before Nicole was called for. They turned to see the colonel looking over his shoulder at them. "I hope you find your friend." He added finnally.

"Thank you Sir." She replied. The colonel nodded to himself almost distantly, as if he has lost many friends himself. The pilots turned back and proceeded to their fighter. Nicole slid open a small panel on the forward side of the craft, and keyed in her access code. The front bay door began to slowly lower and she slid back the panel again. Once inside, with the door locked behind them, Nicole and Mike took up their possitions infront of the view screen and waited. From their elevated possition, they could see the full mess of Covenant bodies, and the city beyond the water.

"What do you think are our chances?" Asked Nicole. In the far distance, a few explosions lit up the tops of tall buildings.

"Us?... Or Earth?" Replied Mike, looking out in disgust. Nicole

shrugged.

"Both, I guess."

Mike didn't respond. He sat there still staring at the scene of a once proud nation. Nicole was going to push the question further, but was cut off by the radio before she could speak.

"Bravo zero-four, your up." Spoke the young comms op from the building ahead of them. "Fire team Kilo one-four needs your help in ridding them of a wraith threat. They are pinned down in the telecomms building in grid 658.243. Make haste. Over."

Mike tapped the comms to reply. "Copy that. Bravo zero-four heading out. Over." Nicole flipped a few switches and the Longsword hummed to life. Shortly afterward, it rumbled as she lifted it off the tarmac and retracted the landing gear. As she sped off over the creek towards the city, Mike pulled up the grid reference on the map in the corner of the screen, and a NAV marker was placed over a tall building in the distance. As Nicole flew closer, she had to bank left and come at the target from another direction. She flew in a wide circle and before long, the wraith could be seen as a small dot firing blue plasma mortars at the building. She swooped low, with Mike opening the under-carrage bay doors.

The marines trapped in the building could hear the oncoming roaring of the bomber between each blast from the wraith. Within seconds, the wraith exploded and the Longsword was gone again. The marines would of had no time to thank them as everyone ground side was too busy to indulge in pleasantries. And just like that, Bravo 04's errand was over. Mike called in the repot to Fell's Garrison. Over the course of the next few hours, the pair had been given orders to bomb four more targets. They had brief encounters with banshees' but their Longsword's speed out matched theirs. After the last bombing, they reported into Fell's Garrison. Only this time there was no answer. Mike tried time and time again, and as they approached, clouds of smoke could be seen in it's place. Their transmission was soon acknowlaged by a small squad in the area.

"Bravo zero-four, this is company November five-one." Spoke a female voice. "Fell's Garrison is lost. The Covenant came back and cleared them out."

"Copy November five-one," Replied Mike. "Are they still there? Any survivors? Over."

"Situation unknown Bravo Four. We havn't seen any activity from this side. Over."

Mike looked over at Nicole, who glanced his way.

"We have to land." She stated.

"Agreed." Said Mike. The Longsword swooped down over the base and flew a wide circle.

"November five-one," Spoke Mike into the radio. "We are running low on fuel and need to land. What is your destination? Over?" Time seemed to pass slowly before they got a reply. The smouldering wreckage of Fell's Garrison pitifully offered them one cracked



landing pad, far enough away from the flames. The woman on the ground came back to them.

"We're bound for New Mombassa to help with the clean up. Foxhole Delta gives permission for us to come pick you up. Over."

"That would be appreciated. We will be landing at Fell's Garrison. Whats your ETA? Over."

"Ten minuets. See you there. Over and out."

The pair started their decent. By chance, Nicole noticed a pair of warthogs on approach off in the distance. "You think thats them?" She asked Mike. He followed her gaze and nodded.

"Most likely."

"If they have full 'Hogs, how are we going to hitch a lift?" She asked.

"I'm sure we'll find something to tag along in." Mike reassured.

They landed on the cracked and broken landing pad, furthest from the smouldering wreckage of the base and started to gather thier things. Rations, ammuniton, and med kits - were all stuffed into dufflebags in preperation for the journey. They exited the Longsword with rifles raised, just incase something miraculously managed to escape thier assault. Nothing moved, apart from the smoke and flames.

"Looks like it was an even fight." Mike commented.

"I don't buy it." Nicole said.

The two crept forward, sweeping their guns back and forth. They moved together, almost back to back. Mike mothioned towards the comms building that was partially destroyed. They stooped low, and got within ten feet of the open door. Then two rounds of green plasma lashed past them, comming from the right. Nicole cried out as one of the rounds caught her in the calf. She fell to the floor and Mike instantly took her by the arm. He dragged her as fast as he could through the open doorway and into cover. there he propped her up against the wall, facing the open end of the destroyed building. Mike then took his rifle in both hands again and braced against the door frame. Nicole groaned at the burning pain in her right leg and tried to shrug it off. She took her own rifle in hand and covered the second exit.

Mike looked at her briefly. "You going to be alright?" He asked.

"Yeah," Nicole replied, hissing inwards through her teeth at the bite the aliens weapon had just given her. "Get that fucker for me."

Mike edged round the door frame and hunted for the attacker with his eyes. A few seconds later, he heard it. "Shoo, shoo!" It said. Twenty yards, peering through the gaps of supply crates under a high metal canopy, was a yellow armoured grunt.

"You gotta be kidding me." Mike growled.

>His quiet words provoked another pair of plasma shots his way. Mike

ducked back into the room where Nicole sat against the wall.<p>

"What is it?" She said painfully.

"A grunt." He said, humorously. "We got jumed by a fucking grunt!"

"Is it on it's own?" She asked.

Mike nodded uncontrollably before they both burst out laughing. After a moment, Nicole set something straight.

"Don't you dare tell anyone about this!" She said still chuckleing.

"It's emarrising enough just being here with you!" He laughed. "Let me put thing thing down." He decided to take the grunt out from a different angle as it now knew where he last was. Mike walked at a crouch to the destroyed end of the room and poked his head round.

>The grunt was acting quite strange. It was alone and thumping the floor with it's club-like arms. Muttering to it'self, it was clearly confused and trying to fool it'self that it wasn't alone out here. Mike watched the crature for a while, before ending the things life with a short burst from his assault rifle.<p>

"Its dead." He announced as he re-entered the room, rifle leaning on his shoulder.

"Good." Groaned Nicole.

"Want a hand back to the ship, wait for the pick up?"

"Yeah. Thanks." She said, taking Mikes outstretched hand. He supported her and walked her back the their longsword where he sat her down again against the front wheel.

While they waited, Mike decided to salvage ammuniton from the fallen marines, who had suffered plasma burns to parts of their bodies. Mike even investigated the covenant casualties and pocketed a few plasma grenades. He picked up a curious weapon that drew his eye. It resembled a rosy coloured aubergine. Curious, Mike pointed the weapon over the half melted fence at the end of the compound, and squeezed the handle. A bright red ball of plasma erupted from the end and arched away into the distance. A few moments later, a dull explosion was heard.

"This'll prove useful." He said. Smiling proudly at Nicole, like a boy who had just caught his first big fish. Nicole rose from the ground and shook her head while pocketing some DMR ammo she had aquired.

"In your hands, I'm not too sure." She joked. Mike chuckled and continued to scavage what he could. Moments later, he called out to her again. "Nicki, look over here!" He cried. She dropped the thoughts that occupied her bored mind and turned her eyes to where Mike was. On the far side of the compound, he was trying to heave a heavy garage door out of the way, with little sucess. Behind it, she caught sight of a forgotten warthog. The side of the garage had been

demolished, and there was no space to turn the vehicle around. "It's stuck!" Mike grunted.

"That, or your too weak!" Nicole bullied back with a laughed. "Maybe you can ask November five-one for help!"  
>Mike mockingly raised a finger at her in jest.<p>

"I'm going to load it up before they get here!" During the next five minuets, Mike had filled the gunners deck with their packs and filled other packs he had found with more ammunition and stolen covenant technology. He also added many weapons, such as shotguns, and extra rifles. The 'Hog was so laden with goods, that he had to strap some of the bags to the gun turret itself. As Mike secured the final straps, they heard the honk of a nearby vehicle. November 51 had arrived and it's occupants were approaching on foot.

A tall woman introduced herself to Nicole.

"Bravo zero-four I presume." She said. "I'm Captain Amy Huddleson, November five-one." She Knelt and offered her hand. Nicole took it and gave it a shake.

"Flight Luitenant Harper." Nicole announced. "And thats Aiman first-class, Mike Bowski." Mike was still a distance away. Captain Huddleson nodded and stood. She smiled when she noticed their scavenged warthog nearby.

"I see you found yourselves a 'Hog!" She called to Mike. "Need a hand getting it out!"

"That'd be much appreciated Ma'am!" Mike shouted back.

"No problem!" She replied. The captain looked back down at Nicole. "Good to see you two are resourceful. Also saves you sitting on my company's laps." She laughed. Amy waved to Laura to bring her warthog closer and instructed her and Haru to secure the tow cable to the iron door. The wathog drove on to help Mike. Huddleson looked about at the carnage for a moment, and told Pete and Chris to comb the area for additional supplies.

Within minuets, the garage door was loose. It crashed to the ground and was dragged back a few feet by Laura's warthog. Haru hastily untied the cable and allowed her to reel it in. Mike drove the new 'hog back to Nicole and helped her into the passengers seat. They pulled up next to the other warthogs and introduced themselves to the rest of November 51.

Within five minuets, the three car convoy was eating up the Kenyan plain, with their drivers gunning their vehicles at full speed towards the heart of the covenant controlled city.

## 10. Chapter 10

**\*\*Chapter 10\*\***

13:40 20th October 2552 (Military calendar)  
>Shimanzi Underground fuel depot.<br>New Mombassa West

"While you're here," Informed the sergeant. "Reload or take a new gun

from the mobile armory and make yourself useful." Rachel had found a large group of soilders that had dug themselves in, overlooking a wide main road. The Covenant were attempting to advance their forces west, on foot, expanding from the city center. After her crash, Rachel crept through the dark back alleys, past the patrols and falled comrades. She broke out infront of the squad and was nearly beheaded by a UNSC sniper. She was taken into the group was now part of this particular fight.

>Rachel saluted the sergeant and double timed it towards an abandoned grocery store towards the back of the blockade. Forward facing machine gun turrets were continually fireing down the highway, along with dozens of marines. Plasma fire slashed through the air, some were clearly stray shots, while others narrowly missed her by inches. Men and women screamed and yelled. Some in pain, and others in anger.<br>At the makeshift armory, two soilders were busy reloading assault rifles and pistols, and laying them out on tables and counters. Boxes of grenades, land mines, and other explosives were stacked up in piles.

"The sergeant sent me to fetch a rifle." She stated as she stopped inside the doorway. One of the two soilders stopped to look at her.

>"Help yourself. Take what you need." He said, gesturing around the room.<br>Rachel wasn't much for the assault rifle, but she snatched a few clips for her pistol and pocketed them. In the far left corner, stood a couple of mobile weapon caches'. Their yellow lights flashing fiercly, inticing anyone to the spoils that lay inside. She trotted over the cabinets to see what was there. One cache held battle rifles' and SMGs', while the other had a few sniper rifles' and a rocket launcher. Without hesitating, she grabbed a sniper rifle and a few boxes of spare rounds for it. Rachel ran out of the armory, thanking the two soilders for the weapon, although she doubted that they cared. They grunted something in response as she left. Back in the street, she ducked behind an abandoned car to avoid any stray enemy fire. She put her back to the chasis and looked up at the tall building ahead of her. It seemed like the perfect place to pop a few heads from. Infact, it might have been where her head was almost popped from. Gripping the rifle tightly in her hands, she made ready to bolt for the structure. When there was a break in Covenant fire, she sprinted.

It didn't take her long to enter and power her way up three flights of stairs. In an empty room, strewn with turned over computer tables and paper, she unclipped the rifle's bipod and rested it on the window sill. For the first time, she could see the covenant advancing into this sector of the city. The common Covenant set up was present; with the eliets sending waves of grunts forward as cannon fodder, followed by Jackals. Some blue armoured eliets; the rookies in their class, tried to advance prematurely. Their impatience was quickly punnished. From the floor above her, Rachel heard the distinctive crack of another sniper rifle. The blue eliet cart-wheeled backwards from the force of the shot. And only a white trail was left hanging in the air, drifting with the autumn breeze. Rachel cocked the rifle and took aim towards the back of the road. Behind Covenant barriers and portable energy shields, loomed her targets. The gold eliets. She knew that if she mannaged to kill them all, the rest of the enemy platoon would flee in terror, leaderless. The Commander Eliet ran this way and that, only standing still for a second to point and bark orders at his troops. That second was all that was needed for Rachel to pull off a shot. A millisecond before impact, the Eliet moved and

was caught in the shoulder. Its shields flared off and the warrior stumbled. He glared up in her direction and roared. The eliet seemed to be growling right through the lens and pointing at her. Rachel was just about to squeeze the trigger again when a searingly hot pink needle, sixteen centimeters long, zipped through and imbedded into the wall behind her. She dropped her rifle and instantly curled up on the floor and shielded her face with her arms. Four more needles zipped in and also stuck in the same wall. Only a second later, they all exploded. Hot pink glass and plasma spray shattered all around, ricocheting off her clothes and melting it a bit in places. Rachel uncurled afterwards, checking herself over. No injuries. Her pilots light armour had done its job. The sniper above fired two consecutive shots, followed shortly by one more shot.

"Hey, you on the floor below," A male voice called from above. "Get your ass up here!" Another shot was released as Rachel reached for her gun and scrambled for the door and the stairs. She bolted up the stairs in only a few bounds, and quickly located the room that the other sniper had set up shop in. The man had fired the last round in his clip and was crouched under the window reloading. Rachel ducked down against the door frame.

"Hey!" She called. "Did you get the gold eliet?" Blue plasma streaked through the open window and burned marks in the ceiling above her. She scrambled over to the soldier and reloaded her own rifle.

"Yeah I got him." Announced the man. "But that was just one of them. I spotted another to the far right, behind the bus, but hes dug in good."

>Rachel nodded to him as she slapped in another clip and cocked the loading bar of her gun. She stood up and began unloading rounds down the street. After the second shot the man called up to her. "My name's Duncan by the way." Rachel fired another shot after a brief moment before answering.<p>

"Rachel." She stated without looking at him. Duncan looked about thirty with not much stubble on his cheeks. He got up off the floor and stood next to Rachel. "I take it your the guy who almost took myhead off." She quired.

>"Ah," Confessed Duncan. "Sorry about that." He said.<br>Rachel forgave him, and for the next hour, the two of them painted the air with vapour trails. After which, not much was left standing. The Human forces looked like they had won, and upon looking down at the platoon, only three members had suffered any injury, one of them had an arm missing. Rachel figured he was the one screaming after a heavy volley of needles flew towards the barricades. The second leader class eliet had not been hit in the battle, and was nowhere to be seen. Rachels company began to relax, and were collecting more ammunition for the inevitable second wave.

## 11. Chapter 11

**\*\*Chapter 11\*\***

12:54 20th October 2552 (Military calendar)  
>B 08 Nyali Bridge. Northbound<br>New Mombassa

The newly enlargend squad's convoy had ploughed it's way down the kenyan hills and through the newly evacuated communities that

surrounded the area before the bridge. Covenant activity was only evident in those areas by a few blast marks and some dead bodies, long since cleared out by November 51's colleagues that had passed through earlier. by this time, Nicole had patched up her leg and felt more secure in her movements. the morphine deffinatly helped.

The convoy was now on the B 08 Nyali bridge, heading north towards the smoke and flickering flashes of light, that were soon followed by the delayed sounds of explosions. Mike had kept pace with the two leading warthogs over the past hour or so, and easily follwed thier skills as they glided beween abandoned cars and debri. Snaking their way towards the city accross the four laned bridge. Before they had reached half way, the squad slowed to pass a destroyed ghost. It's grunt occupant lay dead a few meters behind it. The ghost was smoldering from a fire under its hood, and the armour was riddled with bullet holes.

"Must have been a scout." Remarked Chris over the squad radio.

"Well I'm glad to see it didn't get very far." Replied Amy.

The team moved on towards another small fire about a hundred yards ahead. They did their best to traverse the stationary traffic which proved to be thicker towards the center of the bridge. At points, each driver had to gently push their tires over other vehicles, driving at a severe tilt.

>Within minuets, they stopped, and none said a word. Some eyes open, staring to the right, while others had their eyes closed tightly, facing the opposite direction. Pete's face had hardened into a solid frown of hate. His hands ever tightening around the steering wheel as if he could choke it. Laura had Louise's head in her shoulder, and Mike, Nicole and Chris were staring in disgust. Amy took off her helmet and laid it in her lap. She took her eyes away from the scene and gave a moments silence.<br>To the right of the convoy, against the barriers, slouched the burning remains of a battle torn warthog. It's two front wheels missing, it's machine gun plates melted way, along with half the left sides armour, and passengers, melted also, to their seats.

>Their faces burnt and swisted into the emotions the souls had last portrayed, and the gunner was on the floor, also, charred black by the plasma and fire.<p>

After a minuet of silence, only broken by the distant explosions and sobs from Louise, Amy nudged Pete in the arm with her elbow. He looked at her, but she didn't look at him. She only lifted her head forward, gesturing to move on.

"Lets go." She said. In a tone so low that Pete was unsure if he had even heard her. He pushed the warthog into drive, and slowly rolled forward. The other two cars behind, did the same.

The wreck they passed was no doubt one of the other teams from Foxhole Delta. Amy thought about what must have happened. The ghost must have been intercepted first, and the warthog sustained damage from that fight dispite being victorious. And with no other covenant bodies around, she could only speculate that a pair of banshees' finnished off the job. \_Covenant bastards. \_She thought. \_Always have to fight unfair.\_ Her nostrils flared but she soon realised that she cant let her emotions get the better of her. She had a squad to run, and her original five, had increased by two. She needed to remain

strong and possitive for her team.

Half an hour later and chit chat had picked up among the 'hogs. Mike and Nicole were telling of the fights in space and what had led them here in the first place. Covenant activity was little to none. Occasionally the group stopped to take down the odd team of grunts or Jackals. As they entered the city it's self, things changed dramatically. New carriers emerged from the clouds, Covenant carriers. Within minuets, there were more than three above the streets of New Mombassa. Joe and Chris's turrets kept an eager eye on the sky, for new banshees or phantoms. Every time they spotted one, Amy denied them the shot. The more time they had to get to their destination without trouble the better.

"What is this stuff?" Asked Louise from the second warthog as she tried to pluck little blue particles out of the air.

"Thats the stuff left over from the EMP Darky." Joe told her. "They're just dead electrons. Harmless." They were now entering the heart of the city. The place where all the 'fun' was. Pete stopped the convoy at a cross roads. they had been driving relatively straight since the bridge.

"Which way Captain?" He asked. Amy was checking her compass and looking around her for land marks. Searching for signature structures proved difficult when half of it was already leveled to the ground.

"Take a left." She told him. "Keep going for a mile. We should come to the entrance of the Shimanzi quadrant."

Pete turned the wheel left and accelerated down the mostly empty highway.

"Who are meeting there Amy?" Asked Laura from the warthog behind.

"Lima two, three and four." She replied. "They are holding an underground fuel depot there. We need to meet up and help them defend it. Those supplies are invaluble to the UNSC."

The road they travled on was the A 109 coastal highway that ran the circumference of New Mombasa. The view to the sea was mainly obstructed by the thick row of buildings that lined the curb to the left. As they ate up the tarmac, Nicole noticed an upturned pelican on a roof top up ahead on the west side.. She pleaded with Amy to stop the transport to take a look. After explaining the reasons for her anxiouness, Amy agreed to pull over. They turned left and drove down a short ramp, into the buildings open car park. Once they had stopped and Mike had turned off the engine, Nicole stumbled out of the warthog.

"Hey, take it easy." Mike said. "You're not going anywhere fast with that leg."

>Nicole braced herself against the chasis and looked back at him.<p>

"Care to help me then?" She asked, gesturing to the roof top. Mike got out and jogged around the vehicle to support Nicole. He put one of her arms around his neck, and withdrew his pisol in one hand. Amy

watched them for a moment before she told Chris and Louise to go with them.

"Be sure your all back in fifteen minuets." Amy ordered. "We cant stay here for long.

>Chris and Louise paced ahead of Mike and Nicole. and took point.<p>

They entered through an open door into the dimly lit corridor. They flicked on the flashlights attached to their assault rifles and edged deeper inside. Soon they found the door to the stairs and had been uncontested so far. Step by step, Mike helped Nicole upwards to the floor above. Chris and Louise checked each room themselves before bringing the other two forward. Five mimuets later and they emerged on the roof top through an open door. Chris scanned the adjacent roofs and windows for snipers, but all was silent. Nicole lifted her head to see the tail end of the pelican. the white, upside down stencils read T- 29.

Nicole gasped in realization that it was Rachels ship. She pushed Mike away from her and hurried as best her leg could give, towards the wreck. Mumbling strangled words as she feared the worst. The cockpit was buried in the floor, and as Nicle reached the ship, her hands shakily felt their way towards the back entrance. She was shaking all over. A lump came to her throat as she neared the exit ramp that was ajar.

"No," She mumbled. "No Lord, please, no."

Chris and Louise glanced at eachother back by the door. Mike, gave a small sigh, and hoped Rachel was alive in there. He walked over to the pelican as Nicole squeezed through the gap and into the darkness.

>"Rachel?" Nicole called. She was scared. Her brain was a wash with worst case scenarios. She did not want to find her partner in any of the terrible scenes that Nicole had going through her mind. After she cleared the empty troop bay, Nicole moved into the cockpit. Her boot tapped something on the floor. She leant over and picket it up. Trying her best to see in the dim light, she could tell it was a pilots helmet. It had to be Rachel's helmet.<p>

Nicole searched the rest of the cockpit. No body. She hunted around for clues and checked the supply cache. It was empty.

><em>She escaped the crash.<em> Nicole thought. Her spirits boosted, Nicole hobbled out of the pelican to where Mike was waiting for her.

"Everything alright?" He asked her.

"She made it out!" Nicole said. "I'm sure she did." She steadily walked back to the door where Chris and Louise had posted them selves. Nicole scuffled over to the door and inspected the lock. It had been forced open from the outside. A smile grew across Nicole's face. "She's alive!" She called out. Mike jogged back to them all with a smile on his face aswel.

"So where do you think your friend would be now?" Chris asked.

"It's only been a few hours I'd guess. She would have linked up with others by now." Nicole told them.



"Maybe she's with Lima company." Suggested Louise.

After a hasty, and for Nicole, a painful decent back through the building. The small group exited via the first door they had entered. The four in the warthogs were discussing the war torn city and their possible tactics in this environment.

"I'm telling you, a ghost has the same fire power as our LAAG guns do Joe." Pete was saying. "I've seen it with my own eyes. A ghost and a warthog opened fire at the same time, and blew up. At the same time."

"But surely, my gun fires faster than theirs." Protested Joe. "I can nail them easily!"

"Trust me Joe, if you see one coming, you had better be sure that you open fire first." Pete said.

"Oh so no pressure for you then Joe eh?" Joked Laura to her gunner.

"I'm not phased," Said Joe. "I've destroyed many a ghost. Not a problem."

It was then, that Amy noticed the other half of her squad arrive. Nicole was in the lead, wincing now and again when ever she had to move her right leg. She looked pleased and defiantly in a hurry to get moving.

"Is it her ship?" Amy questioned.

"Yeah, it is." Nicole said as she leant on the bonnet of Mike's scavenged 'hog for support. "But Rachel's not there. She got out and must have left the area by now." She manoeuvred round to the passengers side hopped herself up onto the bottom of the warthog's door frame. With a bit of effort, she managed to place her damaged leg into the footwell before sliding the rest of her body onto the seat. The other three had made it back to their own respectable vehicles and one by one, the warthog's roared to life.

"Nicole," Spoke Amy's voice over the radio. "I'm afraid we can't make any more stops now. We've lost enough time as it is. Once we hook up with Lima teams, I'll make some enquiries. I'm sorry, we can't go looking for your friend."

"I understand captain, it's alright." Nicole replied. The troop turned their cars around and began exiting the car park, back up the ramp they drove down earlier. The same formation was adhered to: Pete's 'hog taking point, Laura's right behind it, and Mike's staying close behind that. They pulled out onto the road and proceeded left along the highway again. The peacefulness quickly vanished into nothing but a memory when two banshees' swooped in behind them. Mike was the first to spot them when, by chance, he checked his rear view mirror and saw their decent between the buildings.

As he cried out over the radio, "Contact!" The ships opened fire. Chris and Joe spun their LAGG guns around and Joe opened fire. Amy twisted in her seat to see the two banshees' locked in a fight with Joe, Plasma fire peppering the ground around Mike and Laura's

warthogs. Mike's 'hog jerked at the rear as a plasma round slammed down onto the back end.

"Pete, Laura, split!" Ordered Amy. "Mike, move ahead!" The two lead warthogs split off to separate sides of the highway, allowing Mike and Nicole to power on ahead. With the most vulnerable vehicle in the lead, Pete and Laura closed the gap behind. Side by side, they shielded Mike's 'hog. With a clear shot in sight, Chris joined his turret buddy. It didn't take long for the pair to blast down one banshee after the other. It took only a few minutes, but their fight was not without consequence. Chris' defensive plating on his turret had been half melted away, and on the chassis below him, gaping holes revealed the road beneath. Joe's turret was fine, but the warthog had no rear lights or bumper. As well as the damage to the back, the roll cage had partly been eaten away by the plasma as well. "Good work boys," Congradulated Amy as they continued down the road.

## 12. Chapter 12

### Chapter 12

15:15 20th October 2552 (Military calendar)

Shimanzi Underground fuel depot.

New Mombassa West

The complex was quiet. the covenant had not attacked for over half an hour. Duncan would occasionally shoot something down the alleys and road, but nothing serious enough to spur the entire troop into action. Not just yet at least. Rachel found herself sitting against the wall next to the front door of the building she sniped from. The warm mid afternoon sun was moving over in favour of the thick clouds that loomed in the distance. Rachel sat there, like a lot of the other marines, eating their MREs'.

Having not eaten in over eight hours, her chicken breast and cornbread stuffing tasted remarkably nice. Once she was done, she discarded the wrapper on the floor and took out a poor looking cigarette from its packet. Bent, but surprisingly still intact. She smoothed it out and lit it from the match that came with her MRE. She puffed away on her cigarette in thought for a few minutes, watching the clouds creep ever closer.

"Do you think we scared them off?" Asked a nearby marine to his friend. His eyes nervously darting around the road the covenant had attacked from.

"Too right!" His friend confidently announced. "They saw how bad-ass we are, and turned tail! Probably gone to cry to their prophets." He laughed.

"I wouldn't be too sure about that if I were you." Rachel announced from her sun-speckled corner.

"And what makes you say that? Pilot." The arrogant marine asked, putting special emphasis on her rank.

Rachel ignored his insulting tone and stood to her feet. "Have you

not once read the intel reports from the other colonies? From ONI? Or is your head so far up your arse that you fail to accept the facts?"

The marine's friend gave a low whistle at her words and chuckled at his friend. The bitter marine, who was sat on a supply case, shot his friend a look of hate before trying to stare down Rachel. Rachel drew on her cigarette before continuing.

"The Covenant never retreat. They never back down and surrender. You better keep your wits about you. Private. Or You'll be getting tea-bagged by an elite before you know it."

The friend laughed at this but received a swift punch to the stomach by his seated team mate.

"You think your so smart don't you pilot?" He said as he stood up, ignoring his friend's gasps for air. He walked over to her and stood only a foot away from her. Rachel stood up to confront him. He was easily a head taller than her, and of a broader build too. He jabbed Rachel's armour in the chest and sneered at her. "You fly-boys keep your eyes on the sky, and do your job of ferrying real troops to where they need to go."

Rachel's eyes narrowed at his words. Despite the marine being taller and stronger than she was, she didn't feel the least bit intimidated. She batted his hand away from her and looked directly in his eyes. "I'll remember you." She said. "You had better remember me. Because next time you need an evac... I might just leave you there. See how well your swollen balls work on the enemy." The butch marine's face showed a hint of concern behind his stone features, although he did well at not showing it. Rachel didn't let him say another word. She turned and walked away before he could retort. The man spat at the ground, following her with his eyes as she walked out into the open courtyard.

While Rachel surveyed the scorched and peppered scene ahead of her she retraced her thoughts back to the academy. How there was always tension between the marine and naval corps. 'Fly boys do the flying, marines just do the dying.' They used to say with spite. True, the Naval corps spent most of their time in the air, away from most of the fire. But the 'fly boys' did their fair share of dying too. Did that marine not know that the odds in space are 3:1 in favour of the Covenant? Asshole She thought. He had no idea what her and her colleagues went through. Maybe he should have been in the crash when she was. Then maybe he'd have a bit more respect.

She pushed the thoughts of the marine aside, knowing that he wasn't worth her time. Her eyes drifted from one Covenant corpse to the next, wondering what their home worlds were like, and what kind of creatures they would have been before they joined the Covenant they have been peaceful? Swayed by lies to help the other Covenant gain an advantage? Who joined first? And what sparked the attack on the whole human race? These were questions that no one knew, and the last question was one that every human being had asked more than once; Why us?

After about ten minutes of pacing around with her thoughts, Rachel was pulled back to her current surroundings by the sound of vehicles approaching. The sound was unmistakable - Warthogs. She looked around

at the rest of the defence team to see that they too heard the noise, and were all staring in the general direction of the sound. Some marines got to their feet or walked towards it a few paces. Two members of the squad ran ahead to the road to get a better view. Both of them were of a higher rank. Probably a captain and lieutenant, Rachel figured. She decided to investigate also, and half jogged to a group who had assembled by the road-side too. The two officials were about ten feet ahead when the first Warthog rounded the corner. then another, and another. The lead vehicle came to a steady halt beside the higher ranks and introduced them selves, while the other two Warthogs fell in behind the first.

Rachel took a step forward, intrigued by the back up that had arrived. Her curiosity paid well. For as the occupants exited their vehicles, she saw a familiar face hobble out from behind the last car. A tall man who had been driving that particular Warthog jogged round to meet her and took her arm around his shoulder, helping her to the curb. Rachel's adrenaline spiked and her heart rate increased. She ran towards the hobbling woman, past the officers who glanced at her in confusion as she called out to her friend.

"Nikki!" Cried Rachel, as she sprinted forward. Nicole only had a second to lift her head before Rachel was upon her.

"Rachel!" Nicole gasped in surprise. "Jesus, I'm so glad you're alive!" She sighed as she embraced the spontaneous hug Rachel had just put on her. Mike instantly ducked out of the way and smiled at them both. He didn't say anything. Instead he decided it was best to leave them to it, and help unload the convoy. Nicole held Rachel's head close to hers and together they swayed a little.

"I'm relived to see your ok too." The pair raised their heads and looked at each other.

"I'm ok," Nicole announced. "Apart from a plasma burn to the leg. But I'll be fine in a day or two."

"We'll get you to the medical tent then. They will patch you up proper." Rachel told her as she broke from the now loose hug. She took Nicole's arm and put it over her shoulder to support her.

"We found your Pelican by the way. What happened?"

"EMP." Rachel told her as she helped Nicole walk. "That Carrier's slip space rupture caused a huge shock wave that killed my controls. Thankfully I missed the water, or I would have sunk like a brick." She looked puzzled for a moment. "Speaking of birds, wheres your Longsword?"

"Safe. I hope." Replied Nicole. "At Fell's Garrison."

"Fell's Garrison? I was temporarily stationed there. On paper, I still am! Did they survive the attack? I got word that they had been engaged by the enemy."

"Overwhelmed more like." Nicole's face was grim. "Mike and I were there to help hold off the first attack, but they came back in force while we were off on a bombing run."

While the two pilots made their way to the medical tent, the rest of

their convoy comrades were busy talking to the lieutenants.

"It's a good thing you got here when you did." The lieutenant told Amy. "The unusual silence is concerning, but with your warthogs' and supplies, we can take advantage of this momentary cease fire, and rebuild our defences." He looked to the junior lieutenant by his side and gave him a nod. The junior LT turned on his heel and briskly walked over to a nearby group of marines, issuing orders and pointing at sandbags. "I need your 'hogs unloaded, and two of them positioned by the forward barricades." Continued the lieutenant. "The last one I'd like you to put on scout duty. Back the way you came, doing a wide circle around the area. If things kick off, they are to head back here and hold this rear entrance."

Amy snapped a crisp salute to the CO, and her squad did the same.

"Consider it done, sir." She said. The lieutenant gave her and her team a slight nod, before turning his back on them and walking back towards the complex. Amy faced her crew, all of them eagerly awaited her orders. "Joe, Louise," She called. Her two friends were close to Laura's warthog, with Laura stood right next to it. "You two unload the 'hogs. Once they are empty, accompany Laura and and Mike to the forward barricades."

"You got it K." Acknowledged Joe. He and Louise began unstrapping the weapons and ammunition, ready to be collected by a few waiting marines. Amy turned her attention to her last two squad mates, who since the lieutenant had left them, were now casually leaning their backs against their warthog.

"Pete." She said, stepping up to them.

"Ma'am." He replied with a smile.

"Your my best and fastest driver." She told him. " I can't entrust anyone else for this task." She looked to Chris next. "As ever Chris, you'll be by his side." Her eyes looked over them both for a few seconds. A hint of concern emerging on her face. finally, she swallowed a small lump that had developed in her throat, and wished them luck. "Look after each other out there. And come back in pone piece, okay?"

"You can count on us Amy." Pete reassured. Chris chuckled as he climbed up to the turret.

"Yeah Amy, don't fret." Chris told her. "We'll find out what the coo is and be back in an hour."

"Make it less than that." Amy urged. "I don't want you two out there any longer than you need to be. Find out what's going on, then get your asses back here."

"No problem." Said Pete, climbing into the driver's seat and starting the engine. Amy forced a smile as she watched Pete turn the warthog on a dime, and drove towards the end of the road. She only looked away once Pete and Chris had turned left onto the main road and out of sight.

The warthog crept cautiously along the highway, like a timid horse

being coaxed forward by its rider. Chris was forever turning his turret this way and that, keeping an eye out for any Covenant movement. Nothing in their area moved, other than the odd banshee or phantom that glided overhead, which for some reason, refused to engage them.

"Here comes another one." Chris told Pete. "Shall I let it pass, or take it down?"

Pete looked up from the road and buildings, to the sky and the lone banshee that was heading in their general direction. He briefly studied the angle of the craft and noticed that it was not dipped in a dive. Pete brought his eyes forward to the road again, and without another glance, he told Chris not to engage.

They're not interested in us bro." He said to Chris. "Shooting at it will only bring shit our way. Try not to use your gun until it's absolutely necessary." The Overhead banshee passed by quickly, without so much as gesturing a twitch towards them. Chris resisted the urge to track the vehicle until it was out of sight, and concentrated on covering Pete's blind spots. Still, nothing on the ground moved. Pete carefully manoeuvred around the odd marine and civilian bodies that lay in the road, yet made no attempt to avoid the Covenant casualties. The hydrogen fueled engine pushed it's large tyres over the alien corpses, splitting armour and crushing bones. The sounds were mildly satisfying to the rocking warthog's occupants, as it trundled forward. Ten minutes later, Chris and Pete heard a commotion up ahead. Pete stopped his vehicle and tried to listen. "Dude," He whispered. "You hearing that?"

Chris leaned forward into the gun stocks, placing an ear between the two armoured defence plates. Within seconds, Chris had heard it too; Covenant shouts of anger, things being thrashed about, and the muffled sounds of aliens dying.

"What the fuck is that?" Chris exclaimed, pulling his face away.

Pete eased his warthog forward again. "That's what we're here to find out." He said, as he drove left and parked up on the pavement. When he cut the engine and jumped out, Chris gave him a perplexed look.

"Pete man, what are you doing?" Pete reached over his seat and unclipped his assault rifle from the passenger foot well.

"The 'hog makes too much noise Chris." He told him. "If we're to get closer, it's going to have to be on foot." He checked the clip in his rifle before looking up at Chris on the turret. "Did you wanna come with? Or stay here and look after the car?"

Chris jumped down from the gun and smiled at Pete. He unclipped his own rifle from the roll cage and cocked it. "We're a team Pete. I'm not going to let you run off and have all the fun!" Pete smiled back at his friend, happy to know he's by his side.

"Thanks bro." He laughed. "Although I don't think theres much fun to really be had. Come on, let's find out what these bastards are up to." They left the warthog behind and jogged for a few minutes to the end of the street, where it split at a T-junction. They pressed

their backs against the tall building and crept their way to the corner, with Pete in front. Chris dropped to a knee and scanned the area around them, while Pete poked his head around the corner. Not five seconds had past before Chris felt a tap on his helmet. He looked up to meet Pete's puzzled eyes. Pete jerked his head towards the corner and the two soldiers traded places. Chris cautiously leaned around the bricked corner and was bemused by what he saw.

The sounds of alien commotion had died down, and littered across the road were dozens of Covenant bodies. The majority of the dead appeared to be elites', with some brute bodies nearby. Grunts cowered in doorways, in front of the remaining brutes. One brute in particular stood in the middle of the road, wearing red and black armour, with an elaborate head dress. In one of it's hands, it held an enormous hammer, the head resting on the tarmac. In the brute's other hand, it had grasped in it's claws, the long neck of an elite. The elite was a Sangheili commander, clad in gold coloured armour. It's helmet lay scattered a few meter away. Chris noted from his teams intel briefings, that this particular brute was a chieftain - one of the most feared Covenant warriors. The brute snarled in the face of the beaten elite, holding it a few feet off the ground. the Sangheili looked defeated, yet managed to spread it's mandibles and roar back. Before it could fully raise it's four fingered fist, the brute threw its head forward, smashing it's helmet against the elite's face.

The elite's body went limp, now literally dead weight in the iron grip of the brute. It's head fell against it's chest, and Chris could see that it had been caved in from the impact. Dark purple blood ran down it's armour and dripped to the floor. The brute chieftain growled again at it's victim and threw it to the ground. It then turned to another brute nearby and grunted a single word in it's ape-like language. Without moving, that second brute faced the others and nodded. The detained grunts started crying out and screaming as the rest of the brutes slaughtered them. Some simply filled their bodies full of spikes, while others felt content enough to beat them with their arms, clubbing them to death.

Chris heard a loud roar and flicked his eyes to the source. To his horror, he saw the brute chieftain staring at him. Right at him. Through sharp black eyes. It bared it's teeth as it wielded it's hammer in both hands.

"Oh shit!" Chris exclaimed as he ducked out of sight. He legged it past Pete, who had to do a double-take of his friend before giving chase.

"What!" Pete asked, calling out to him. "What happened!"

Chris didn't look back. He ran towards the warthog that waited a short way ahead.

"They saw me Pete! He shouted back. "We've gotta get the fuck outta here!"

"Jesus Chris!"

They ran as fast as they could, trying not to listen to the war cries of the brute not far behind.. Pete and Chris made it back to the warthog in less than a minute, and only once they had climbed in,

were they face to face with their new threat.

Six brutes had rounded the corner and were charging their way towards them. The chieftain was leading, holding its mighty hammer at the ready, waiting to smash anything that came within a four foot radius. Pete hastily started the engine and kicked it into reverse. Just in time for Chris to start firing. Chris concentrated his sights on the chieftain, trying to keep the shots level with it's head.

Brute armour had shields similar to the eliets. Only, this brute's shield was different. A dozen rounds from Chris' machine gun had barely hit, when the chieftain's shields flared a blinding white. No matter how many rounds hit the living flare, nothing broke through.

Pete pulled a hand brake turn, spinning the warthogs nose away from the enemy. Spike rounds struck the drivers side and rear as he put the vehicle into drive and tried to put distance between them. After the manoeuvre, Chris swung his turret's attention to a low ranking brute on the left, and fed it a long burst of bullets. It's own shields couldn't stand up to the powerful, armour-piercing rounds, and hit the floor within seconds, easily overwhelmed. Chris mocked the brutes with a small whoop as they sped away, but was swiftly punished by a lucky shot to his left thigh. He fell to the deck and clutched his leg

"Ahh..!" He hissed through clenched teeth. "Rude..!"

Pete took his eyes off the road for a second and glanced back to his friend. He could see the six inch metal spike protruding from his leg, just above the knee.

"Hang in there buddy!" Pete told him. He face the forward again and pushed the accelerator closer to the floor. Like an expert rally driver, Pete swerved around abandoned cars, mounted adjacent sidewalks, and drifted around corners.

Pete brought his wounded team mate back to the complex in record time. His tyres screeched in protest as he rounded the final corner, announcing their arrival to the defending marines. He quickly parked his vehicle in a defensive position and called out for a medic. They arrived moments later, and while they eased Chris onto a stretcher, Amy sprinted over to them. Chris groaned in pain as the two medics picked him up and carried him off to the field hospital.

"Pete, what happened?" Amy asked, watching Chris pass her. Pete had taken his friend's place on the LAAG gun and looked down to his sergeant. He gestured to the eight metal spikes that peppered the side of the car and explained what had happened.

"Did they follow you back here!" Amy queried, looking down the road before them.

"I'm hoping they gave up." Pete answered. "But we're not taking any chances right?"

"Right." She mimicked. "You stay put with these marines," She told him, nodding to some soldiers crouched behind a wall of sandbags not far away. "I'll be with you when the Covenant return. I need to see how bad Chris is and report your findings." She dismissed herself and



jogged back through the courtyard, and to the field hospital.

Amy was only a few steps from the door of the tent, when a booming voice called out to her.

"Sergeant!"

Amy stopped dead in her tracks and spun around to see the lieutenant striding over to her. She gave him a quick salute and addressed him as he stood before her.

"Lieutenant!"

"At ease Huddleson." He said, taking off his cap and rubbing his forehead. Amy let her arm drop to her side and her shoulder relax. "I heard your scouts returned. But the gunner is injured."

"Private Cochrane. Yes." She informed him. "I was on my way to check on him now sir."

"I see. How was he injured?"

"Spike round to the leg sir. Hopefully nothing serious."

The lieutenant voiced no concern for her friend. Instead he only made an observation as to what would have shot him.

"Brutes..." He grumbled. He stared off into the distance a moment, his face went slightly pale. After a while, he brought his eyes back to Amy's. "What did your men find out?" He asked.

"It would appear that the brutes and the elites are engaged in some sort of dispute or power struggle." She explained. "My scout driver, Private Nicholson, reported seeing evidence of elites and their grunts being attacked by the brutes."

The lieutenant scratched his stubbled chin thoughtfully.

"Just when we think we're beginning to understand them... I'll pass this on to command. No doubt ONI will want to hear about this. Thank you sergeant, that'll be all." He saluted her to which she returned, then they went their separate ways.

Amy walked into the field hospital and was welcomed by the strong smell of disinfectant, along with a loud yell from a familiar voice. The painful sound was followed by the voice of another man, who swiftly retorted.

"If you move, it's going to hurt more! Nurse, hold him down!"

Amy stepped around the curtain to see Chris lying on a bed. The doctor had one hand on his leg, and one around the spike, while a nurse tried to hold him down by the shoulders.

"Ma'am, I', going to have to ask you to wait outside." The doctor told Amy.

"I'm this man's sergeant." She replied. "I'd like to stay."

"Suite yourself. In which case, as your here, you can help hold him

down. Your private's a bit of a wuss."

Chris laughed through pain at the doctor's remark.

"Oh, rude! I wouldn't be complaining so much if you gave me some morphine!"

Amy was now on her friend's side with a hand on his shoulder. She shot a look to the doctor, almost offended.

"You haven't given him any painkillers?"

"He's had two shots already." The doctor stated. "It's not my fault the drugs haven't taken effect yet. And before you ask, no. He can't have another. We are on limited supplies here." He looked up to Amy for the first time. "Can we get this over with? I have other patients to attend to."

Amy accepted defeat and nodded to the doctor. She turned to Chris and gave him a sympathetic look.

"I'm sorry Chris. Looks like you're going to have to suck it up." Chris groaned and threw his head back against the pillow. After a long sigh, he clenched his teeth.

"Do it." He said. Amy took his hand in hers for emotional support and held his shoulder down with the other. The doctor pulled hard on the brute spike and tried to keep Chris' leg still, as his patient shouted and writhed in agony. Amy had to close her eyes and turn her head away from the scene, fighting blindly to keep Chris in one place.

The long scream ended as the spike released its grip from inside Chris' leg. As the doctor pulled it clear, and arterial spray erupted into the air, covering part of the bed and floor as it landed. Pressure was instantly applied to the open wound, covering the doctor's rubber gloves in shiny red blood.

"Nurse, apply a tourniquet!" Ordered the doctor over the sound of Chris' cries. The nurse did just that, and within minutes, the blood flow had slowed enough for the doctor to begin cleaning the wound. By this time, Amy had her hand back and was asking how long it would take for her team mate to recover. The doctor handed over the rest of the treatment duties to the nurse as he answered Amy's query. "He's going to be out of action for a few days while the wound heals." He said, taking off his gloves and throwing them into a nearby bin. "It doesn't look like the round hit the bone, so he's lucky, I'll give him that. In the few days he needs rest, the wound will need to be treated regularly, and monitored for any sign of possible infection. I know our current circumstances aren't ideal, therefore I'd advise you try and get him out of the city."

Amy thought a moment at the possible places Chris could go. One place stuck in her mind

"Could we get him aboard the UNSC saviour?"

"I'd imagine they could accommodate him, yes."

"Is that the giant hospital ship?" Chris interjected.

"Yes," Answered the doctor. "Currently stationed in low orbit over the Mediterranean."

Chris looked up to Amy and met her stare. "I hate hospitals'." He said. "And that, is one BIG hospital."

"Chris," She began. "I'd rather have you battle ready in a few days, than to suffer here, and possibly die if this place gets blitzed." She told him. "Your going, and that's an order."

Chris looked down to his leg, to which the nurse was currently dressing with a bandage. He nodded and sighed.

"Understood..." He said.

End  
file.